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Chateau De Ramezay
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Contemporary Accounts of the Champlain and
St. Lawrence Railroad

Since the appearance of Mr. Robert Brown's scholarly history of the Champlain and St. Lawrence Railroad, which appeared in Bulletin No. 39 of the Railway and Locomotive Historical Society in March, 1936, there have come to light three new contemporary accounts of Canada's first railway. They are in order of their appearance -

1. News item in the "Quebec Chronicle" of July 13th, 1836,
2. Journal of the "Gilchristiana" for 1836, and
3. Record Book of Thomas Lester Dixon, for 1846 to 1853

The Editorial Committee consider that these accounts are of such importance that this Bulletin has been devoted to reprinting them in so far as they are of interest to railway historians. In each case they are accompanied by an explanatory note contributed by Mr. R. R. Brown, by Mr. R. W. Shepherd, or by the Editor.

News Item, "Quebec Chronicle", July 13th, 1836: In the account of the opening of the Champlain and St. Lawrence Railroad, which appeared in the Montreal Morning Courier of July 23rd 1836, there was the statement, "Before starting, the locomotive engine made two short trial trips with its tender, and as the accident which occurred lately to it had not been thoroughly repaired, it was deemed advisable to attach it to only two of the covered passenger cars." The nature of the accident was not mentioned and all hope of discovering an account of the accident was abandoned. Sometime after the Bulletin No. 39 of the Railway and Locomotive Historical Society was printed, a search was made through the files of the Quebec Chronicle in a fruitless effort to find a record of when the locomotive "Dorchester" arrived in Canada. However in the issue of July 13th 1836 the following item was found, "An accident has happened to the locomotive for the railroad. The fireman let the water out of the boiler and kept the fire going until the flues were burnt. She will need new ones before she can proceed".

R.R.B.

Journal of the "Gilchristiana"

The manuscript book, from which the following short descriptions of the appearance of the locomotive "Dorchester" are taken, was apparently a sort of journal written by different members of a club called "Gilchristiana" in 1836. The book contains, among other things, several accounts of the various excursions made by the club and was found in 1935 in "Riversmead", Como, P.Q., the house, built in 1849 by the late Captain R. W. Shepherd, President of the Ottawa River Navigation Company. It was described by me in a paper read before the Association on October 21st, 1936.

"Sunday 26th June, morning quiet and gray - cool and agreeable. Cloudy a little but not lowering nor indicating rain. The members of the tribe arose from their couches somewhat later than usual and breakfasted at home by way of novelty.

Sallied forth in good spirits, anticipating great pleasure from the excursion decided on for the day. Arrived at the Newmarket precisely at nine o'clock accompanied by the Ham, carried in state in a basket, a champagne basket. Henry the carrier, thought he was a trifle fatigued, t'was indeed a lusty ham.

Stood and admired the "MONARCH" floating proudly on the noble stream: She was truly a "MONARCH" there. Several other vessels at anchor near her, looked as if they felt their insignificance, slipped their cables and dropped further down, as if desirous not to bide the contest longer.

Wished ourselves on board of her and bound for 'our ain countree'...

"Our meditations disturbed. The party all assembled. The tribe in full muster, embarked in the war canoe provided for their use and stood onward to cross the river. Bore up alongside of the "MONARCH" and hailed our friend Captain Welsh: said our adieus to him, wished him a prosperous voyage, waved our chapeaux and pulled on. Soon gained the other side of the stream, disembarked and packed ourselves into a splendid chariot, drawn by four brilliant bays, in first rate style. The road to the City of the Prairie seemed short, notwithstanding the many wonderful things we saw and admired.

Arrived at Laprairie, patronized Mr Hotchkiss, do not like the name. Would rather not kiss when there's "hotchin'". Walked towards the railway.

Reached the railroad office. Was almost frightened at the display of jars and tinpannikins. Lighted

cigars, whiffed and puffed away, most industriously, sitting on a large stone by the side of the river, where we had an opportunity of admiring the new wharf, recently built for the Railway Company.

It extends about 1100 feet into the stream. Stood the brunt of the ice last winter without damage. Went and looked at the new locomotive carriage, compact and elegant and the fuel car and feeder well built and very neat.

Horses by this time yoked to the pleasure and baggage cars. Mounted the latter, said to be the easiest in its motion. Seated ourselves on stools.

Kept in countenance by the Messrs. Pierce. The elder the projector and principal promoter and the railroad, the other superintendent and agent on it.

Had the best of the fun. All the grog in our locker. Had the pleasure of drinking to the health of our camarados on the other car, when they were dry.

The line of railway well built and finished, the route extremely agreeable. Here and there some pretty spots, especially in the ravine. A few delightful situations for cottages. Was struck with the greenness of the verdure on the fields and the foliage on the tress. A perfect sheeny brightness when their boughs waved in the sunshine.

Arrived at a shady grove, pitched our tents and opened our wallets.

Moreover, drew sundry corks. Then there was a clanking of tinpannikins and the sawing of knives against the bone of our goodly ham. The pineapple-cheese was soon in slices and the olives quickly disappeared. Bread vanished speedily and wine and something more gurgled down a few thirsty throats.

Then there was climbing of trees and gymnastic feats of every kind. The spot chosen was well suited to the occasion, shady and cool.

After spending two hours or so, struck our tents and proceeded

homeward. Hoisted our colours and sported green boughs. Rattled along joyously and soon reached Laprairie. Sauntered awhile there and rested at the Hotchkiss's. Refreshed ourselves with some milk and accompaniments.

Hired a bateau, embarked and were pulled quickly down the stream. Had some good voyageur songs from our pilot and crew. Landed at Point St. Charles. Bade good-bye to Mr. H. Pierce and Mr. Edmonstone, engineer, who bore us company so far. Bathed, proceeded home, reached the lodge somewhat tired but well pleased with the trip we had taken.

Entered in the book 27th June 1836"

"T'was on a bonny sunny day in the month of August that Moringhar and Macrimmon, lacking business matters to attend to at home, resolved on proceeding to St. John's by the way of the famous new railway, which has, so lately, been opened between that place and Laprairie.

The day was one of the most delightful of a charming season and when on board of that excellent boat the PRINCESS VICTORIA, which so truly 'walks on the water like a thing of life', they enjoyed the purity and coolness of the air on the river with uncommon gratification.

Time hangs heavily upon the passengers on board of steamers, let the passage to be accomplished ever so short and to wile its weariness away, even in the limited span between Montreal and Laprairie, Moringhar and Macrimmon had recourse to a measure which some, in the dignity of their minds, might deem childish and was neither more nor less than hanging their heads over the forward part of the vessel to gaze at the cleaving of the green element by the prow of that arrow like craft.

So great was the velocity that a constant shower of minute liquid particles were thrown several feet from the cutwater: and whilst they

trembled and glittered in the sun's rays, seemed like, diamonds copiously scattered around or like a block of the clearest crystal shattered into a thousand fragments by a crushing collision with a heavier mass.

Arrived at Laprairie and had to wait some time the return of the locomotive and cars from St. John's. At last they were seen approaching and a desire to view the whole in rapid motion, led us forward a short distance on the road to meet them.

Whirr, whirr, puff, puff - by they rushed with almost stunning impetuosity and lightning speed. The cars are of rather elegant construction and tastefully painted: on each, the emblazonry and armorial bearings of Great Britain and the United States, emblematical, we presume, of the connection of British and American interest and enterprise, combined together in the completion of a work so much required and so important as this is. A number of passengers were brought along on that day, many of whom were ladies and some of them very fair ladies too. At least we remember one who pleased our fancy exceedingly with her fine figure and her sweet face...

When we were on the point of starting for St. John's, part of the machinery of the locomotive gave way and the steamer having a minute afterwards left the wharf on her way to Montreal, we were with our usual good luck, left in a delightful dilemma, with the alternatives before us of either walking to St. John's, being dragged in cars thither by horses, or of remaining in Laprairie from three o'clock in the afternoon until the morning. The latter would prove horrible indeed.

The engineer, however, after some trouble, was enabled to put the engine into such a state as to put it in our power to proceed and accordingly we started, between four and five o'clock.

We had not got more than a mile over the road, when the deplorable concern gave way again. Another half hour suffices to get us into condition a second time to go forward and rattling along in very good style indeed.

We reached St. John's a few minutes before six in the evening. By the bye, the engineer, an American, is about as cool a fellow as we have seen for some time. He did not appear in the least degree disconcerted nor seem to lose any of his stock of self possession, notwithstanding the accidents and delays we met with and he gave evidence of understanding his profession thoroughly.

We wandered to Mrs. Watson's, where we got a very comfortable sort of a dinner and commenced strolling the streets and smoking cigars, very much to our edification and amusement. Were amused at the industry displayed by a young man

in driving a young lady in a gig, up and down and round and round the same limited streets for the space of nearly half an hour at a pace which was certainly creditable to the beast that dragged them.

Walked and smoked till it got dark and after it was dark. Met all the beauty and fashion of the town promenading and were enchanted by the music of sundry glistening pianofortes. Got some gin sling and went to bed.

Mrs. Watson's bedrooms are delightful, comfortable and exceedingly clean. Quite a treat to get between the snow white sheets. Arose next morning in good time for breakfast, which was good.

St. John's pleasantly enough situated, but of itself, as a village "pas grand chose".

Embarked in car and were whirled to laprairie. Embarked on board the steamer and were whisked down the rapids to Montreal.

19th August 1836"

Record Book of Thomas Lester Dixon

Through the courtesy of Miss Muriel Buck of St. John's, P.Q., we are able to reprint extracts from the Record Book of her great-grandfather, Thomas Lester Dixon.

Thomas Lester Dixon was a painter by trade. He migrated with his family from Manchester, England, in 1842 and, after landing in New York, reached Montreal and spent a few months there as the prop. of a small shop. He finally established himself as a painting contractor in St. Johns. From time to time he was employed by the Champlain and St. Lawrence to paint its locomotives and cars. His accounts relating to this work are reprinted below.

The business of Thomas Lester Dixon continued until 1934 when, on the death of his grandson, it came to an end.

In order to help the student to appreciate these accounts the following list of locomotives, owned by the Champlain and St. Lawrence during the period, 1846 to 1853, is appended -

Dorchester	Built	1836	Sold	1850
Lapraire		1837	"	1850
Jason C. Pierce		1838	"	1850
Montreal		1846		
John Molson		1848		
Canada		?		
St. Lawrence		1850		
St. Lambert		1851		
St. Helen		1851		
Dorchester		1851	new locomotive	
Lapraire		1851	new locomotive	

It is known that several of these were renamed and it was hoped that the Record Book would give some information on this point, as well as information concerning the colour scheme of the locomotives and cars. This hope has not been entirely realized.

The Record Book mentions a locomotive called the "Champlain". The origin of this locomotive is a mystery. It may have been a Champlain 8 St. Lawrence locomotive renamed, the Norris engine bought in 1837 and thought to be the "Lapraire", or one of the "Champlains" of the Vermont Central, or Ogdensburgh and Lake Champlain Railroads.

March 15th 1846	Painting small engine	£ 2- 5-0
" 26th "	Varnishing & blacking up 2 first class cars	1- 5-0
" 30th "	Varnishing & blacking 3 first class cars	1-17-6
April 3rd "	Painting "Jason C Pierce" Engine	2- 5-0
July 9th "	Painting Railroad Engine	1-12-6
" 29th "	Painting 2 first class cars	30- 0-0
April 6th 1847	Railroad Painting Montreal	2-10-0
July 28th "	Writing Drawer for New Ferry Boat	0- 7-6
December 8th, 1847	Writing "Burlington & Boston"	0- 3-9
March 27th 1848	Painting the Montreal Engine	5- 5-0
April 8th "	Painting the Engine "Jason"	4-15-0
" 17th "	" " " "Dorchester"	4-15-0
" " "	Painting 2 new freight cars	1- 0-0
March 21st 1849	Painting "The Montreal"	7- 5-0
" 28th "	Painting "The Dorchester"	4-15-0
April 7th "	Painting "The Champlain"	8- 5-0
" 23rd "	Painting Baggage Cars 6 & 7	0-18-0
" 25th "	Painting 5 Baggage Cars	2- 5-0
April 26th "	Putting in Glass for Champlain	0- 1-6
May 5th "	Painting the "Jason" Engine	7- 5-0
May 16th "	Painting Axles of "Champlain" tender	0- 2-0
Sept. 29th "	Painting Engine "John Molson"	8- 5-0
March 3rd 1850	Painting 3 Railroad Engines	20- 0-0
April 27th "	Painting Engine "John Molson"	8- 5-0
June 29th "	Painting New Platform "John Molson" Engine	0- 2-6
Sept. 22nd "	Painting 2nd Class (old)	6- 0-0
March 31st 1851	Painting the "John Molson" Engine	8- 5-0
March 27th "	Painting the "Montreal" Engine	6-15-0
April 22nd "	Painting the "Champlain" engine	7-15-0
May 13th "	Blacking Engine ("St.Lawrence","Champlain")	2- 5-0
June 6th "	Painting 4 wheels (green) and Blacking "Montreal"	0-10-0
October 10th "	Painting 11 Signs (Railway Crossing)	9-12-6
Nov. 14th "	Blacking Smoke Pipe & Cow Catcher on "St. Lambert"	0- 5-0
Nov. 14th "	Putting in Glass to "St. Lambert"	0- 0-2
Dec 1st "	Painting Snow plough "Canada"	0- 3-9
Dec. 2nd "	Painting Blackwork on "The Canada"	0- 1-3
Dec. 27th "	Paint for the "St. Lawrence"	0- 7-6
Oct. 13th "	Painting part and Varnishing all St. Helen Engine	2-15-0
Oct. 20th "	Writing & painting 2 signs for St.Johns	0- 7-6
Oct: 31st "	" " " 6 " " St.Lambert	0-18-0
Nov. 8th "	Touching up the Dorchester Engine & Tender	0- 7-6
Nov. 10th "	Painting the Express,Accommodation Car Compt	11-17-6

Nov.	12th	1852	Painting 4 Snow Ploughs	0-10-0
Nov.	13th	"	Touching up the "St. Lawrence" Engine	0- 1-3
Dec.	1st	"	Painting & varnishing pr. of wheels for "Canada" Engine	0- 1-10-1/2
Dec.	29th	"	Touching up St. Lambert Engine	
Dec.	30th	"	Touching up "Laprairie" Engine	
Dec.	24th	"	Painting the "Canada" Engine & Tender	7-10-0
March	1st-31st	'53	Work done to the "St. Helen"	8-14-4-1/2
March	31st	1853	Painting the "Laprairie" Engine complete	7-10-0
April	9-12	"	Painting on "The Dorchester" & St. Helen"	0- 6-3
April	9-12	"	Cleaning old Albany Car - blacking and varnishing	1- 7-6
May	9th	"	Painting to St. Helen Engine	0- 2-6
May	21st	"	Painting Stripping & Varnishing Brakes for Ogdensburg Car	0- 7-6
May	31st	"	Painting the "St. Lambert" Engine	7-10-0
June	7th	"	Varnishing etc. the Albany Car	7-10-0
June	7th	"	Painting pair of wheels for the St. Helen Engine	0- 1-3
June	18th	"	Painting old second class	7-10-0
June	23-30	"	Writing St. Johns & Lacolle Stations	
			Writing L'Acadie Station	4- 0-0
June	30th	"	Painting "Champlain" Engine	7-10-0
July	1st	"	Painting pair of wheels for the "Dorchester"	0- 1-3
Nov.	12th	"	Painting Driving Wheels for "The Dorchester"	0- 5-7-1/2
Dec.	30th	"	Painting new driving wheels for the "Laprairie"	0- 7-6

The above contemporary accounts should be considered together with the following extracts from newspapers reprinted in Brown's "The Champlain and St Lawrence Railroad" -

Montreal Papers:

The Gazette,	July 23rd, August 9th, 1836
La Minerve,	July 25th, 1836
The Morning Courier	March 29th, June 16th,
	July 23rd, August 25th, 1836.
The Transcript,	July 18th, 1837

Other Papers:

New York Star,	February 11th, 1836
Plattsburgh	
Republican,	July 30th, 1836.

R. V. V. N.